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SUBJECT: MOZAMBIQUE - PRESIDENT GUEBUZA'S TWO-WEEK VISIT TO  
THE SOUTHERN BACKCOUNTRY

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¶1. (U) Summary: President Guebuza recently completed a two-week trip to rural districts in southern Mozambique. Hopping from point to point by helicopter, he addressed rallies and listened to local concerns in some of Mozambique's most isolated communities. His message -- "together we can win the fight against poverty." At each stop he spoke of a new GRM program to channel to each district every year seven billion meticaïs (approximately USD 250,000) to fund local initiatives. Fighting rural poverty was the central plank of Guebuza's 2004 election campaign; no doubt Guebuza sees the trip as delivering on this pledge. Judging from the enthusiastic throngs at each stop, including some who traveled considerable distances to meet him, so do many rural residents. The visit also gave Guebuza a chance to showcase to provincial voters the FRELIMO government's attentiveness to their concerns in advance of the country's first-ever provincial level elections next year. Summary.

¶2. (U) President Guebuza, with several ministers and the press in tow, visited by helicopter the provincial capitals and a dozen rural districts in the four southern provinces of Gaza, Inhambane, Manica and Sofala over the period March 16-31. Some of the districts in southern Manica provinces -- where the epicenter of the February 23 earthquake was -- and western Inhambane are among the most isolated in the country. There he inspected earthquake damage and promised more government support. Elsewhere he inaugurated schools, visited clinics, reviewed irrigation schemes, looked over agricultural projects, strolled through local markets and saw firsthand the inadequate to non-existent road, electricity, water and telecommunications infrastructure. At every stop he was met by welcoming crowds (with dancers in some instances) whom he addressed in "open government" fashion, inviting members of the audience on to the podium for their questions.

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Fighting Poverty  
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¶3. (U) His main message to the people was "together we can win the fight against poverty." He spoke of government programs underway to meet peoples' needs and boost living standards -- a new credit line for some rural communities, the expansion of the national electricity grid, more funding for roads, schools and water, and relief supplies for earthquake, flooding and drought victims. He gave more

emphasis, however, to urging his audience to be more resourceful, and to not expect that the government alone would bring progress. Mozambique had extensive untapped natural resources, he told them, and the people only had to look around themselves, in some instances, to supply their needs. Moreover the central government often did not know the best answer, meaning local experience and expertise should be the guide. This shift in thinking was borne out at some of the stops. In Sofala, the governor demonstrated how local sources had financed projects to use annual floods for small-scale reservoirs and irrigation systems. In Panda, Inhambane province, Guebuza witnessed how three local investors had started a livestock business to supply milk and meat, toured two projects involving small-scale foot pumps to irrigate fields and learned of new agricultural associations.

(Note: In many stops he reminded the crowds of the enormous challenge posed by AIDS, calling on them to act responsibly and mentioning limited government assistance. But his focus at meetings during the trip, essentially, was on combating poverty. End note.)

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Funding District Governments  
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¶4. (U) Since taking office a year ago, Guebuza has emphasized the importance of district governments. To help district authorities to provide more leadership in local development, the GRM will sweeten the pot. During his trip Guebuza announced that the GRM will allocate, each year, seven billion meticaïs (approximately USD 250,000) to each of Mozambique's 128 districts to fund local initiatives. (Note: This works out to about USD 32 million. End note.) Also, in keeping with guidelines laid out by the GRM last November, each district now has "consultative councils" (composed of traditional leaders, civil society representatives and local officials) as part of the district administration. Guebuza told his audience that these councils are designed to reflect

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local input, giving the populace more of a say. Moreover, in so far as they also will help oversee proper use of funding, they will, according to Guebuza, serve as a check on corruption. At all of his district-level stops he made a point of meeting with newly established consultative councils.

¶5. (U) Guebuza invited his listeners to voice their concerns, saying that he had come to listen. Many complained about the effects of prolonged drought, others about localized heavy rains or flooding that had washed away roads and cut them off. At one stop he heard complaints of low cotton prices, at another concern that traditional fruit trees had been cut down to grow tobacco. Some mentioned corrupt local officials and frustration over bureaucratic delays. One very common issue was the hardship caused by higher fuel costs, which affected everything from transport to pumping water to power generation.

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Comment  
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¶6. (SBU) Guebuza made eradicating rural poverty the central plank of his 2004 "electoral manifesto," and doubtless sees this trip as a step forward in delivering on this commitment. One of Guebuza's stops was at Chibabava, the district where Afonso Dhlakama, the leader of the main opposition party, RENAMO, was born, and another at Beira, Mozambique's second largest city, which is run by RENAMO. By visiting traditional RENAMO strongholds and promising some help, Guebuza has done a bit of politicking. He probably hopes to exploit the initiative to boost district authority, an initiative donors hope will lead to greater decentralization of power, for political purposes, too. Overall, the visit gave Guebuza a chance to showcase to provincial voters the FRELIMO government's attentiveness to their concerns in

advance of the country's first-ever provincial level  
elections next year.  
La Lime